

THE PROBLEMS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF LUTHERAN INSTITUTIONS IN THE CIS¹

by Gerd Stricker

*Dr. Gerd Stricker, editor of a two-volume collection of documents on Russian Orthodoxy in the 20th century that appeared in Russian and German, and author of **Russland. Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas** (Berlin 1997), a major study of the German minority churches, plus numerous articles on Religion in the USSR, is a member of the staff at Glaube in der 2ten Welt, the well known research institute near Zurich Switzerland.*

At the theological seminar of the Ev. Lutheran Church in Russia and Other Countries (ELKRAS in German, ELCROS hereafter), from March 24-26, 1999, representatives of all the Lutheran schools met near St. Petersburg for a working conference. The author had been invited by the Lutheran World Federation and by the archbishop of ELCROS, Dr. Georg Kretschmar, to participate as independent specialist and advisor. The purpose of the conference was to obtain a factual overview of currently existing programs of theological education. Future conferences are to discuss educational structures and the possibilities for cooperation, and to attempt to reach comparable standards of training and examination in the regional church bodies.

We present the conference in detail because it allows us to illustrate a broader post-Soviet phenomenon. Because of the sudden political and economic collapse, we recognize that there is now such a diversity of theological education endeavors, even within a single confession, that any immediate coordination has become most difficult (even the Moscow Patriarchate faces difficulties). Many institutes keep very busy, with lots of goodwill, but little experience and hence with many problems. Everywhere there is a shortage of money, suitable professors are rare, exchanges of experience happen only infrequently, and the educational prerequisites of the students are uneven. On the one hand there is extensive assistance from outside, given without strings attached, but on the other hand, there is also foreign aid that serves to foster Western preconceptions. This paper seeks not to evaluate and judge, rather on the basis of a specific example, it seeks to show the exceeding diversity of theological education programs in the successor states to the USSR.

Since the mid 16th century there have been Lutheran congregations in Moscow,

¹This article, here with a few up-dated statistics and translated by the editor, appeared in German in *Glaube in der 2ten Welt*, January 2000, pp. 25-31.

consisting of "specialists" invited by the Tsar. The first Lutheran church, by permission of Tsar Ivan the Terrible, was established in 1576, in the Nemetskaia sloboda (German quarter). Other Lutheran and Reformed churches followed in Moscow and in numerous other Russian cities, to which Western specialists, including military, mining and iron works experts, were called. When the present territory of Estonia and Latvia which had been under German feudal lords came under Russian overlordship (Estonia & Livonia in 1721, Courland in 1796) the Russian emperors/empresses (above all Peter the Great) guaranteed that in the new provinces the dominant Lutheran confession would retain its administrative, school and church structures.

Since the German Baltic nobility very quickly gained leading positions in all areas of the Russian Imperial administration - politics, business, diplomacy, military, administration, and since each member of the Russian dynasty married German princes or princesses, Lutheranism was present everywhere in the public life of Imperial Russia.

Upon invitation of Empress Catherine II 25,000 German colonists immigrated into the lower Volga region around Saratov between 1763 and 1769; and on the invitation of Emperor Alexander I 54,000 colonists settled in the northern Black Sea region between 1804 and 1825 as well as several thousand settling in the Caucasus. A further 200,000 settlers followed them (150,000 of these moved to Volynia between 1861 and 1885). After 1890 there began an inland migration to Siberia since the older German villages were by then over-populated. In this way there arose throughout all of Russia major centers of Lutheranism, since more than two-thirds of the colonists were Lutheran (not quite one-fourth were Catholics, the others Mennonite and Reformed). The Reformation spread to the Baltic Germans as early as the 1520s, and as a result of German rule, the Estonians and Latvians (of Courland) had also become Lutheran in the 16th century. The Estonians and Latvians also formed villages in Siberia (though less in number), coming as settlers or having been banned there.

Founded by Imperial Decree in 1832, the Evangelisch Lutherische Kirche in Russland (Ev. Lutheran Church in Russia) had the status of a state church (for a minority group), whose leadership would be installed and salaried by the crown. This multi-national church using German as official language, consisted in 1914 of the following: out of a total of 3.67 million Lutherans in the empire (not counting Finland and Russian-Poland), 1.3 million were Latvians, 1.1 million were Estonians, 1.1 million were Germans, and 150,000 were Finnish. Approximately 20,000 Reformed Church believers were integrated into this church, with the

right to conduct Reformed sessions during Lutheran consistories for their special concerns.

Within the Russian Empire there was a differentiated German language educational system with Lutheran emphasis: the Petri and Anne schools in St. Petersburg, each with 1700 students, the Peter & Paul school in Moscow with 1400 students. Lutheran schools in Saratov, Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov, Pskov and elsewhere were smaller in size. Every colonist village of course had its own school, and in 1914 such village school teachers were being trained in 65 teachers colleges (Centralschulen).

In contrast to the training of teachers, the training of future pastors for the 539 Lutheran parishes (referred to as Kirchspiele) serving about 2500 congregations throughout the empire was concentrated in one school, namely the Lutheran Faculty of the German University of Dorpat, now Tartu, Estonia (which had been re-founded in 1802 as a German language university). By the way, the German Roman Catholic diocese of Tiraspol based in Saratov (Volga) also had only one seminary for priests, located at the episcopal center in Saratov (since 1852).

Between the Wars

Following the Revolution of October 1917, Estonia, Latvia and Courland were separated from Russia and formed the free states of Estonia and Latvia. This meant that the University of Dorpat with its theological faculty was now outside the empire, namely in the Estonian city of Tartu, as were a majority of the Lutheran congregations. Within the boundaries of the Soviet Union in 1918 there were 178 Kirchspiele (parishes) for ca. 1500 congregations. Of the 183 pastors in office at the time, about half fled during the Civil War era (1917-20), during the famine on the Volga (1921/22), or because of the first wave of persecutions, so that in 1922 there remained only 84 pastors and 12 preachers.

Thereafter the Lutherans suffered the same fate as all other believers within the Soviet state - through the closing of all the churches and arrest of the pastors the Ev. Lutheran Church was also destroyed. The statistical progression is as follows: 81 pastors in 1924, 84 in 1927, 83 in 1930, 53 in 1932, 34 in 1933, 32 in 1934, 24 in 1935, 10 in 1936, with the last of the pastors arrested in 1937 and the last church closed in 1938. A short stabilization phase between 1924 and 1930 (81-84 Pastors) is due to the formation of a theological seminar (known as preacher courses) in Leningrad in 1925, which flourished from 1925-29. The famous Law on Religion of

1929, which made possible the “legal” destruction of all religious societies, resulted in the closing of the seminary in 1934, though no real course of regular teaching had been possible since 1930. There were 57 future pastors who completed the three year program, but only the first graduates managed to take up their ministry. After 1931 most were arrested before they could start pastoring.

Impact of the War

With the beginning of the Soviet-German war on June 22, 1941, the Russian-Germans were deported to Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Initially in 1941, and with greater finality in 1944 after the end of German occupation, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were annexed to the Soviet Union. Soviet authorities permitted the Lutheran churches of Estonia and Latvia to organize theological courses by correspondence, though the number of students was kept small through repressions and controls. This permitted only a very rudimentary training, and since the number of pastors had been so badly reduced (more than 50%) due to the flight to the West, most students had to take over congregations (normally more than one) almost as soon as they started their studies.

In the deportation regions of Soviet Asia all religious activity was forbidden. Till the 1960s no religious congregation of Germans was permitted, with the one exception of Akmolinsk/Tselinograd (today Astana) in Kazakhstan. Starting in 1955, three pastors who had survived the camps and deportation, began visiting the deportation regions secretly and tried to encourage leading persons in the clandestine Bruedergemeinden (Brethren congregations) toward pastoral service, which rarely succeeded. These Brethren congregations that had survived the deportation regime and which the believing Lutherans of the former official Lutheran Church (the “Bishop’s Church”) had joined, did not need pastors - they were led by senior lay brothers (“Aelteste”), who were commissioned within the congregation for such service.

Only toward the end of the 1960s were a number of congregations in the deportation regions officially registered. Pastor Harald Kalnins of Riga, sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation, was permitted to visit them periodically. He was ordained as Bishop of the deported Lutherans in Soviet Asia in 1988 during the Perestroika period and was allowed to build up a church structure. Today ELCROS, led by an archbishop in St. Petersburg, consists of the following regional churches, headed by bishops: European Russia, Siberia/Far East, Kazakhstan,

Ukraine, Georgia and Central Asia.

ELCROS

New political circumstances finally made it possible to begin to deal with the problem of the pastor shortage. Many of the leading brothers of the Brethren congregations were ordained as preachers, pastors and superintendents (Proepste), and continue to serve - if they have not emigrated to Germany. In addition, there are about 25 pastors from Germany serving in congregations still speaking German. But owing to fifty years of systematic Russification of the Soviet-Germans all are becoming Russian speaking. Those pastors from Germany do not suffice for the 500 Lutheran congregations of Germanic orientation. After several preliminary stages, the Ev. Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS) was founded in 1988, at first under the name German Ev. Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union. Not all Lutheran congregations and groups have joined this German-oriented ELCROS, however, seeking instead independent forms of organization that include their own pastoral training programs. This is why the theological education of Lutherans in the former Soviet Union (excluding the Baltics) offers such an uneven picture.

With its 500 congregations ELCROS is the most significant Lutheran Church in the present CIS. Since a reestablished Lutheran Church organization emerged as part of the Perestroika era, theological education has been the central theme. Beginning first in Riga in 1989, then in Sibiu (Romania) at the Theological Institute of the Transylvanian Germans (Siebenburger Sachsen), and finally after 1993 near St. Petersburg, two-three week courses were conducted semi-annually, for those active as lay preachers (men & women) in congregations, to give them a theological foundation. There followed further forms of training in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Central Asia: seminars and courses on Bible knowledge, homiletics and catechism, confessional and sectarian studies for diaconal work.

Such a correspondence program with only two courses per year, at first not even thematically coordinated, could hardly substitute for the kind of systematic education that Archbishop Kretchmar (formerly church historian at the University of Munich), head of ELCROS values highly. Now the church offers a one year correspondence course (basic theological education) with two-week class session three times per year. In addition, all preachers are asked to participate in two-week seminars devoted to practical-theological topics.

These take place during the semester breaks at the new seminary in Novosaratovka (2-3 week sessions).

Education

In 1994 ELCROS was able to purchase the church in the former Russian-German village of Novosaratovka, a few kilometers east of St. Petersburg. The new seminary that officially started its work in April 1997 was located in this building after some expensive remodelling and restoration. On the ground floor are a small chapel, lecture halls, library, reading rooms as well as kitchen and dining hall. The second floor houses administrative offices and dormitory rooms (2 bed) for 30 students - male and female.

The new seminary is predicated on a three year study program on campus. It includes the major disciplines of Old and New Testament, dogmatics, church history, practical theology (including liturgy and music), students electing either Greek or Hebrew and either German or English language studies. Upon completion of the exams, the graduate is assigned a vicariat under a pastor, who is to expose the student to all aspects of congregational work. Thereafter ordination is possible.

In addition to the financial worries typical for Russian conditions, the seminary leadership faces the problem that the applicants come with very uneven prerequisite education. They have completed very diverse school programs, some have a good working knowledge of German or a few even of English, others have none. The entrance exams determine the suitability of the student.

In light of the massive emigration of 2.2 million Russian Germans (who still spoke German) in the past twelve years, the transition to Russian is certain yet most of the lecturers are German or American, few of whom speak Russian. If the students are unable to follow the lectures in German or English, then there has to be simultaneous translation.

The three year program of study is tuition free, and students receive pocket money, free lodging and food. Even the trip home during semester breaks is paid for, even to as far away as Vladivostok. The student on the other hand, makes a commitment to serve under ELCROS for a minimum of four years.

Which Church Model?

The big question arising upon ordination, is where the pastor will be assigned. Till now the Brethren congregations relied on preachers who were employed elsewhere or were retired -

in neither case did the congregation pay a salary. Full-time pastors require a salary from the congregation they serve. The one model of a pastor who earns a living and in his/her free time serves the church, is unrealistic in light of the major catechetical duties, expanded expectations within the congregation, and because of the fact that every pastor needs to serve several satellite congregations. On the other hand, to support a pastor financially, even if several congregations participate, also seems unlikely given the fact that most church members are living below the poverty level.

Yet another problem results from the small number of students. Only twelve students can be accepted per year. That is, if one takes into consideration early termination of studies, illness, etc. there will be no more than 10 graduates per year. Does that suffice? Even if one assumes that for some time to come these graduates need to be prepared to take on the leading positions (bishops, superintendents/proepste), and that only the central congregations will manage to get trained pastors, these numbers are exceedingly small.

Pastors from Germany are still helping out in Russia and neighboring states. Nevertheless, it is evident that for the time being congregational life in ELCROS churches will not be shaped by trained pastors. The coming decade will show whether the current model - a core of theologically trained pastors and a multiplicity of preachers (male and female) with limited training for specific tasks - will hold up.

Other Forms of Education

Regional offerings of continuing theological education continue alongside of the theological seminary and the semi-annual gatherings of correspondence students. This continuing education seeks to assist those active as preachers, catechists and deacons. Courses lasting several weeks for preachers and active members (Biblical questions, recent church history, ethics, practical theology) are offered by the bishop in **Moscow**, as well as in the regional church of "Urals, Siberia & Far East", with a bishop located in **Omsk**. Here the Lutheran Church of Hannover is assisting with funds and personnel.

Annually 20-30 preachers and church activists come for two weeks of continuing education to the former Moravian Brethren settlement of **Sarepta** (near Volgograd). The Ev. Church of Berlin-Brandenburg provides the financing.

Within the Lutheran regional church of Ukraine (German Ev. Lutheran church in the Ukraine) there is already a tradition of 10-20 day seminars in **Odessa**, which meet several times

annually. The frequency of meeting allows for a systematic formation of preachers and catechists, even of pastors. The German Lutherans in the Ukraine rely on assistance and lecturers from their Lutheran partner churches in Bavaria.

A much more limited financial resource is available to former Bishop Robert Moser (today Bishop Peter Urie) of the regional church of Kazakhstan, who is based in *Astana* (formerly Akmolinsk/Tselinograd). He offers semi-annual courses for preachers, as well as courses for catechists and Sunday School teachers. Students include persons from Kirgizstan. Retired Bishop Dr. /Heinrich Rathke of Schwerin/Mecklenburg has been heavily involved personally. Twice a year, as possible, 10-14 day courses for preachers, catechists and Sunday School teachers take place in *Bishkek* (Frunze) for Lutherans in Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, and Turkmenistan.

Theological literature in the Russian language for Lutherans is lacking. Since most of the students view Russian as their mother tongue, and their German language skills are quite uneven, the translation of basic materials into Russian has high priority. That requires finances and also suitably qualified translators. All of these initiatives are impossible without the financial assistance of various German regional churches; but the increasing financial stringencies within those churches make their aid to ELCROS increasingly difficult.

Because of the vast territory covered by ELCROS, and the financial straits of that region, all of the above named educational initiatives will continue to be needed in the future. But those initiatives need to be better coordinated, expanded and shaped. Without intensive mutual exchange of information between the various institutions, no one institution will be able to work very efficiently.

The Finno-Ingrian Lutheran Church [Ingermanland]

The Finno-Ingrian people are what is left of the indigenous population around St. Petersburg, between Peipus and Ladoga Lake. During the Tsarist era, its 32 Kirchspiele (parishes) with some 70 congregations and 147,000 members were considered part of the St. Petersburg consistory of the Ev. Lutheran Church in Russia. Yet with the exception of the large Marienkirche in Petersburg (15,000 members) most of them relied heavily on Finland where their pastors studied. During the inter-war years, these churches established the Finno-Ingrian Oberkirchenrat (church council) headed initially by Bishop Felix Relander (1922-23), then by

Propst Selim Hjalmar Laurikkala (1922-37) till the church was liquidated. Thus they had been able to preserve their unique identity within a largely German church.

But by 1938 all church life for the Finno-Ingrians was also liquidated. Stalin regarded this little Finnish people, the Ingrians as unreliable, because they lived on the border with Finland, now an enemy state with whom the Ingrians naturally always had close relations. Therefore they were deported in their entirety (before the Germans even) to Asia, tens of thousands of them dying along the way. Only in the 1960s could the survivors return. As with the Russian Germans, the Finno-Ingrians lost their language during the time of deportation, so that the Russian language also dominates in their church life today.

The first and sole post-war Finno-Ingrian Lutheran church registered before 1988 was the congregation in Pushkin/Tsarskoe Selo (20kms south of St. Petersburg). In 1977 it was permitted use of the former German church. The Ev. Lutheran Church of Estonia was permitted to send a pastor, who was then allowed to visit the one Finnish congregation in Soviet Karelia, in Petrozavodsk, once a month.

Other than that, spiritual life was limited to secret house circles for those of the Brethren orientation. Regular church life re-emerged during Perestroika. The Marienkirche in Petersburg was returned to them and became the center and residence of the bishop (the Finno-Ingrian Aarre Kuukauppi since 1996). In former Ingermanland and Karelia there are now 45 congregations, some with satellites, served by 10 pastors and about 35 preachers and deacons. Some of the pastors and church workers have come from Finland. They have also begun missionary work among the Volga-finnish tribes of Mordvinians, Udmurtians and among the Finnish people of Komi Republic..

Education

A church training center was established in Keltto/Koltushi, south east of St Petersburg, as a way of gaining a corps of national church workers as quickly as possible. The background to this was a series of courses for deacons conducted at Pushkin between 1989 and 1994, after which some of the graduates had been ordained to pastoral ministry.

In 1995 the new training center, a gift of the Finnish parish in Espoo, was dedicated. The center includes a wonderful church building, perhaps too large. In Keltto the theological training follows a different concept than in ELCROS. This has to do with the fact that Ingermanland is geographically small so that cooperation and sharing of information are more easily done.

ELCROS, in contrast, has its church scattered across the sweep of the FSU and is constantly struggling with the distance problem.

At Keltto the training center consists of a series of wooden barracks, additional ones can easily be added, some are in fact already being planned. But pastoral training represents only a part of the teaching program. There is also training for preachers, deacons, church musicians, catechists, Sunday School teachers, church administrative staff and social workers. In each case, the training involves courses lasting several days, meeting at periodic intervals. This means that the facilities are in almost continuous use. Since its beginnings in 1995 till March 1999, about 285 persons participated in courses, impressive indeed.

The basic language of instruction is Russian. In almost every program of instruction, there is a mix of correspondence study and attending classroom sessions. For example, the 10-12 students enrolled in a major theology course come to the center for only 65-70 days. While there they stay in four-bed dorm rooms.

For its overall program the Keltto Center relies on 30 professors (20 from Finland, plus America and Russia). All students are required to take a basic course, following which they choose specialty courses (youth work, translator, choir director, catechist, diaconal work, etc.) In order to enter a further two year special program of theological studies, students must pass another entrance exam. At the end of those two further years of study, there is a final exam after which the successful graduate may be ordained as full time pastor.

Graduates also have the option to continue their studies and write a thesis (Diplomarbeit). That happens rarely - till March 1999 the Ingrian church had only four pastors with diplomas. It is from this group that future church leaders and professors for the seminar will be recruited..

The small Ingrian Church is unable, of course, to carry the financial obligations for the training center alone. It is the Lutheran Churches of Finland and the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in USA that provide the most assistance.

Tarnopil' [W. Ukraine]

Alongside of the regional church of ELCROS in the Ukraine, which has its origins in the Black Sea Germans and which offers courses for preachers at its headquarters in Odessa, there is also a small, autonomous Lutheran church in Western Ukraine. During the inter-war years when large parts of formerly Habsburg Galicia were part of Poland, there arose a sharp conflict within

the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church between advocates of a more Latin or more Orthodox orientation. Due to this unpleasant situation a split away group drifted toward Protestantism and in 1925 placed itself under the “Evangelical Church A.B. and H.B. in Galicia”. Its bishop was the famous Theodor Zoeckler, who in 1910 founded the eastern branch of the German Inner Mission, known as the Stanislauer Anstalten. Stanislau (Ivano-Frankivsk) and Kolomea formed the center of the movement, soon dividing up into Lutheran and Reformed branches of about 20 congregations each.

The Lutheran branch held to the "Divine Liturgy" of St. John Chrysostom of Orthodoxy for its main worship services, changing the text only minimally. The Reformed branch, in contrast, sought complete separation from this liturgy and from all forms of Orthodox piety. Both churches disappeared following the absorption of Galicia into the USSR after 1940/1944. Reformed pastor Philemon Semeniuk of Rovno/Rivne is the last of the clergy still living.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, 18 congregations reemerged, who see themselves within the tradition of the Ukrainian Lutheran movement of those years 1925-1944. They are currently served by four pastors, headed by a bishop with his seat in Tarnopil'. The Orthodox "Divine Liturgy" remains the center piece of its worship services.

In contrast to the Lutherans in the Ukraine of German origin who are in transition to worship in the Russian (not Ukrainian) language, these Ukrainian Lutherans retain Ukrainian as language of worship.

Training in the Ukrainian Lutheran Church

This young church organized theological courses in Tarnopil' (east of Lviv) in 1994, hoping to give theological shaping to its own rebuilding. Without their own property, these courses were conducted in rented quarters, the 18 students (March 1999) making their own private living arrangements.

Costs of the schooling are carried by the Lutheran Missouri Synod (USA), and are under the academic oversight of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne (IN, USA). The program has applied for state recognition as school of higher education or as theological faculty. This church has published an astounding quantity of religious literature in addition to its monthly paper.

Decisions on qualifying students (men only) are taken by a commission consisting of professors from the Ev. Lutheran Church in America, the Missouri Synod, and Ukrainian

pastors. Following a one year basic course in theology (including Greek and Hebrew), students then pursue a three-year program of study that follows the program in Fort Wayne (MDiv), with one of those years in residency in Fort Wayne preferred. Upon completion of the basic course and one year of the seminary program, the student may be ordained as deacon with preaching rights. Having graduated with the Master of Divinity degree (MDiv), and completed two years as pastoral assistant (Vikar), such a person may be ordained pastor.

Novosibirsk

During the 1990s a Russian Lutheran congregation with an academic character emerged in Akademgorodok, the university city near Novosibirsk. It refuses to be tied to German Lutheranism, therefore is not part of ELCROS. The key intention, similar to that of the Ukrainian Lutherans, is to establish an independent (autochthonous) Lutheranism without German influence. In light of this, it is easy to understand the American orientation of the group, since the financial strength of the American church is also an attractive factor.

The first pastor of the church, Vsevolod Lytkin, was ordained by the Estonian Archbishop Jaan Kiiwit. Lytkin regards him as spiritual superior for the Novosibirsk church, and the pastor and other clergy of that group are included in the registry of the pastors maintained by the Ev. Lutheran Church of Estonia. Future relations of the Novosibirsk group to other churches are presently under review.

Education

With the financial aid of the Missouri Synod, the congregation was able to build a seminary building. Concordia Theological Seminary of Fort Wayne is actively involved as it is in Tarnopil'. Currently six future pastors are studying. One Fort Wayne professor is permanently based in Novosibirsk, other professors (also from St. Louis) are regularly invited as guest lecturers. The student body includes male and female, but ordination of women is refused (in keeping with Missouri Synod regulations). Female students are expected to become religion teachers, translators, deaconesses, choir leaders, etc. In Novosibirsk there is a one year basic course of study followed by a three year seminary program, with one year of residency in Fort Wayne expected. As in Tarnopil', the Novosibirsk school emphasizes high academic standards.

This seminary, supported by a growing number of congregations (some of them small congregations in Kazakhstan, Buriatia, and Tomsk) is envisioned as serving more than its own

constituency, meaning other Lutheran churches also. A major task that the Novosibirsk scholars are actively engaged in is the translation of Lutheran literature into Russian and its distribution.

Almaty, Kazakhstan

While the seminaries in Tarnopil' and Novosibirsk that are supported by the Missouri Synod can claim the support of a number of congregations that will form the local constituency, an institute in Almaty is an example of a mission project not well thought through, hence easily the target of negative charges of proselytism by Orthodox.

This project in Almaty, begun in 1997, was sponsored by the Missouri Synod, specifically by its department of World Mission. Its basic program is church planting, and it seeks to train church workers even while there is not yet a single church or group established. Essentially, mission and training are to run in tandem. Here too a "national Lutheran Church" was envisioned, but one essentially Russian. Through American aid this future church was to get its own national profile.

At first several groups of interested persons formed, meeting in apartments. The first seven seminarians, some of whom brought personal experience from other churches, were themselves not yet strong in the faith and in no shape to offer spiritual help and stability. So the effort was problematic.

The following courses had been offered by autumn of 1998: Old and New Testament, Foundations of Christianity, Lutheran Catechism, Exegesis, Practical Theology, Homiletics, etc. Guest lecturers from America served in Almaty. Most courses offered were linked with preaching, liturgy, Sunday School and music ("learning by doing", "action - reflection").

Initially there were 30 students receiving full stipends. But when the stipends were reduced to a minimum, only five remained, who were already salaried by the mission with assigned duties. Since of these five only two showed a deep spiritual interest, the seminary in Almaty was temporarily closed in the autumn of 1998.

Missouri Synod Role

One can characterize the theological stance of the Missouri Synod in the USA as conservative, strongly Biblical, confessionally Lutheran, highly liturgical and pietistic. Its financial commitments for activities in the East were generous. Many of its initiatives in the

former Soviet Union are to be welcomed and have been accepted with thanks. Plus the mission commitment of the Missouri Synod people in Eastern Europe and elsewhere is often praised. Women do indeed study at the seminaries of the Missouri Synod in Fort Wayne and St. Louis, but they do not get ordained, serving instead as teachers of religion, translators, deaconesses, choir leaders and other services in the church. The financial support that the Missouri Synod is providing the small Lutheran groups in the CIS, as well as in Ingermanland and for ELCROS is major.

But the role of the Missouri Synod is viewed by Lutherans in Germany as problematic, because they see it as tied to the agenda of spreading the conservative principles of the Missouri Synod in Eastern Europe and Asia. That then results in conflicts with the somewhat more liberal principles of the European Lutherans.

Future Prospects

This survey of the virtual puzzle of Lutheran schools in the CIS reveals a disturbing plurality of problems. The uncertainties and the attempts at independence are characteristic of this religious breakout phase in the post-communist countries, not at all surprising. Similar problems can be detected among the Orthodox, Catholics, Baptists and other religious groups. The purpose of the conference of representatives of Lutheran Schools in CIS that was held March 24-26, 1999 in Novosaratovka, as well as the visit to the Ingermanland seminary in Keltto/Kaltushi, was planned as first step toward future cooperation between the institutions. It turned out to be little more than an exchange of information to establish what was being done by Lutherans. A study commission is to be formed, which is to gather as much information as possible from all the Lutheran schools, in order to achieve a minimum of coordination. For that to happen, individual schools need to define their goals, whether they are fostering the further schooling of lay preachers and coworkers (social work, church music, administration/finance, etc.) whether in Moscow, Omsk, Sarepta or Astana/Kazakhstan; or whether they seek the training of congregational pastors through a practical program, not overly academic, as in the Keltto (Ingermanland) training center, or distance education from Novosaratovka. The institutions supported by the Missouri Synod (Novosibirsk and Tarnopil) strive for high academic standards, as does the theological seminar of ELCROS in Novosaratovska and the program for training pastors with diploma in Keltto.

But there is a basic difference between the ELCROS seminary in Novosaratovka and the Missouri Synod seminaries in Novosibirsk and Tarnopil. Students at the latter have already completed a university degree and expect to be recognized in their university circles as Lutheran theologians and academics. Background for the seminar of ELCROS in Novosaratovka is the difficult ministry in congregations across the breadth of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Central Asia. This practical task determines who is accepted as student, so that in Novosaratovka the students are selected more for their practical promise than their academic records.

Each type of theological training has its justification and place. What strikes one in this period of new beginnings in the post-Soviet states, with its difficulties and happenstance, is the fact that quite often there is a tendency to blur the labels. This can lead to structural damage for the entire church. This is why a constant process of comparing the institutions - not a control of them - and careful classification is very necessary.

The desire of most students at theological institutions is to become a pastor, or at least to be regarded as one. There are those who are ordained following a long, difficult course of studies and practical training (vicariat). But many seem to care more about the reputation of the title. A number of seminaries permit the graduates of their short courses to bear the title pastor, but they are not really sufficiently mature for the variety of tasks, to which a fully trained pastor is prepared.

The different church bodies, in light of specific tasks within their churches, often have quite different expectations of theological education. Some churches regard the office of deacon, preceding ordination as pastor, simply as first step to the office of pastor. In other churches the deacon carries the social work duties. In other regions of the former Soviet Union, lay preachers who participated in courses for a few weeks are ordained with full sacramental authority as pastor. Within ELCROS, ordination of a lay person as preacher is for life, but such a preacher can later be ordained as pastor too.

Clarification and definition of the term Pastor/Pfarrer, with resultant recognition in all church groupings should be the first task of the coordination commission. Once all the groupings of churches settle on a common description of the pastor, they will have achieved, at least in its broad outlines, a basic consensus about the theological education needed for a pastor. The prerequisites for the deacons, preachers and other church workers could be measured against that standard. In that way, consensus on the delineation of the training and role of the pastor

would provide greater clarity for other church offices and would provide a major advance toward greater transparency and compatibility. It would lead to greater movement toward each other as Lutheran Churches in the former Soviet Union.

Viewpoint from Kazakhstan

At the end of the Novosaratovka Conference, Iurii Novgorodov, representative of the Lutheran regional church of Kazakhstan, took the floor to speak. By profession a teacher of Russian, he had been ordained as pastor after taking part in some seminars lasting several weeks. He declared that the theological study programs that had been discussed during the conference did not address the real needs of Lutheran churches trying to get established in the former Soviet Union because they were predicated on too high an academic standard, and, because they were oriented much too intently on western presuppositions, and too little oriented toward an Eastern mentality. The speaker claimed that the Western money to pay for the very expensive theological studies would be much better used for a short, concentrated training in the basics for "emergency preachers". Such training would supply the congregations with ministers (Seelsorger) in the shortest time.

"I am in full agreement with much of the program that you have presented here. But much that was said by American and European specialists, can not be connected with the concrete, burning needs of the churches and the believers, such as ours in Kazakhstan. We too allow ourselves to dream sometimes about grand plans, as they were developed at this conference. But, in all honesty, they are for us at present quite unreal futurism. We face a mountain of problems: We are surrounded by people who feel lost, who seek comfort, intimacy, calm and a way to God. They are hungry abandoned children, lonely pensioners without means, mothers ready to give up the daily struggle for bread, drug addicted youth, young women who are forced to turn to prostitution to survive, and disoriented hopeless intellectuals. The church may not pass over them carelessly. Each country has its own specific problems. Quite clearly, in our present day Kazakhstan we do not need an invasion of feminists or the sexual revolution of Europe and America - Islam is much too strong in our region for that.

Our believers are more conservative than in Europe because of their mentality and living conditions. Maybe that is why the missionaries from the West find themselves in difficulty here. They come with their problems, visions, their Western mentality, and try to win us over. They try

to inject us with their western views, and end up trying to go through a wall. At times they register some success when they "invest" money with us.

As I was listening to your reports about the seminaries now functioning, I started to become jealous. On the other hand, it finally became clear to me here, how realistic was the model that Robert Moser, then bishop of the Lutheran regional Church of Kazakhstan developed, based on the actual life situations and deep needs of our churches, when fostering theological education. This plan with its stages is oriented to our daily church life, and slowly develops to higher levels when possible.

Most of our congregations do not have their own pastor. But we cannot wait the three or four years till finally a pastor comes to us. So we will have to do without a comprehensive theological education for some years to come. And what use is one pastor? We need 20 or 30 pastors. We don't care how you qualify him, and what title you give him, whether pastor, vicar-pastor, deacon or whatever. For us in Kazakhstan, anyone who helps is a pastor, a shepherd of the sheep. Those we need, preferably yesterday. Our congregations long for shepherds, who will tell them the Good News, who will give them communion, who will visit the members in their homes, comfort the old and wipe away the children's tears. Our church does not consist of some abstract "humanity", it consists of concrete individual persons with problems, needs and spiritual hunger.

Right now our Lutherans in Kazakhstan do not care if their pastor can show a respectable diploma. Much more valuable and important is that he be a "Pastor from God". Of course a diploma is important, but it should not be the cornerstone, not styled as the "conditio sine qua non."

Please, do not dismiss Kazakhstan as one of those hopelessly backward regions - we have a great future. But you must help us! Put us into your building plans and do not forget us. You hold it in your hand, to what extent plans and visions will become reality. For authentic help we are deeply thankful."